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D E F E N C E
O F
Mr. V A N S I T T A R T ' s C o n d u c t .

[Price Six-pence.]

DEPARTMENT

OF

THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



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D E F E N C E

O F

Mr. ^hVANSITTART'S Conduct,

IN CONCLUDING THE

TREATY of COMMERCE

WITH

MHIR COSSIM ALY CHAWN,

AT MONGHEER.

By a SERVANT of the COMPANY,
long resident in BENGAL.

L O N D O N :

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TO THE
P R O P R I E T O R S
O F
E A S T - I N D I A S T O C K .

IN the course of altercation on your affairs at Bengall, many injurious insinuations have been levelled at the conduct and character of the Gentleman now presiding there; amongst these, the greatest stress seems to be laid on two accusations; to wit, the Treaty of Commerce made at Mongheer, and a Model of Cannon presented by Mr. Vanfittart to Mhir Cossim Aly Khan. The first of these charges *may be* (in part) founded on ignorance; the second, on premeditated malice only. From both we undertake to exculpate him. Much has been said touching the liberties of the Company's phirmaunds from the Great Moguls, and Confidence asserts they were given up by Mr. Vanfittart in the treaty of commerce he concluded at Mongheer: let us examine this fact first, and clear it of the veil of darkness that covers it.

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When

When Mr. Surman (head of the embassy sent by the Company to the emperor Farrucseer, to solicit the last phirmaund, and explanation of former grants) was on his return to Fort William, he pitched his tents in the neighbourhood of Moorshadabad, and having acquired from the Emperor a title and rank in the list of Omrahs, something superior to that which Jaffier Khan (then Suba of Bengal) bore, Mr. Surman expected the first visit.—Jaffier Khan allowed Mr. Surman's superior title, but considering himself in rank the third Suba of the empire and Vice-Roy of Bengal confirmed from court, thought the dignity of his post demanded the first visit from Mr. Surman: frequent messengers passed between them, touching this ceremonial, for the space of three days; but neither stooping, Mr. Surman struck his tents, and returned to Calcutta.—Thus an injudicious punctilio in Mr. Surman destroyed all future cordiality with a man, on whom (from the nature and power of his post) so much depended, for the due execution of those phirmaunds granted by Farrucseer.

We grant, that in the original phirmaunds to the Company, there was a general liberty of trade given, without any exemption of particulars; but when this general trade as well inland as exports and imports, continued to be exercised by the servants of the Company as formerly, Jaffier Khan presently manifested the resentment he had conceived against the English at Mr. Surman's behaviour to him; and though his predecessors had been troublesome on this head, yet he went much further.

His first operations were, refusing us the right of coinage, and spiriting up the Zemindars, proprietors of the 37 villages on the other side of the Ganges; both ceded to the Company by the phirmaund. These Zemindars kept up their demands so high, and started so many difficulties with regard to parting with their lands, that the Company have

have never got possession of them to this day : from the same cause, their presidency of Fort William was eternally incommoded by a vexatious government's jurisdiction in the very heart of Calcutta, known by the names of Molungah, Simlea, &c.

His next step was to claim an executive right to the trade of three the most staple and lucrative articles of tobacco, salt and beetlenut; alleging, that from time immemorial none had presumed to trade in these three articles, but those who had his particular licence and express purwannah. He signified these sentiments to the Presidency, and prohibited the Company or their servants trading in them for the future.

The Company's servants still persisting to trade in these articles, Jaffier Khan stopped the Company's whole trade and investment for Europe, which could never again obtain a currency but by the payment of a severe mulct, of one, two, three, and sometimes four lacks of rupees at a time.

The same system of politics was pursued by his successor, until the Company at home being wearied out with continued advices of these contests between the Government and their Bengal servants, came to a resolution of relinquishing their right to the trade of these three articles, tobacco, salt and beetlenut, for themselves, and strictly prohibited their servants ever interfering in them; on pain of immediate dismissal from their service; and these commands were repeatedly issued by the Court of Directors to their servants abroad. Henceforward the servants were content to trade in these articles under the covert of a Mahometan dustick (or passport). This they did on the best terms they possibly could with the Mahometan merchant, which was generally a consideration of 25 per cent. a consideration very moderate on articles

that commonly yield a profit of 80 to 150 per cent. This 25 per cent. was a clear profit, without risque, to the merchant who gave his name, provided he was in favour at the Durbar ; but at the worst, he was always able to get off for paying 8 or 10 per cent. customs on the trade he covered, and put the rest into his pocket. Sometimes a joint trade was entered into in co-partnership, though not always in equal proportions.

The continual abuse of the Company's dufficks, by their servants, has been for the space of forty years last past, another great cause for repeated just complaints from the Durbar ; for thereby the Emperor was robbed of his legal customs on a considerable proportion of the trade of the provinces.—As the nature of the Company's duffick, and the mischiefs arising from the abuse of it, must be little known to you ; a short explanation of both, becomes here absolutely necessary to your information.

The Company's duffick is a passport for their trade, issued under their broad Persian Purwannah seal, or seal of office, signed by the President, and counter-signed by the Secretary to the Council, specifying the quantity, number, package and quality of the goods to be passed by virtue of that particular duffick, clear of all duties, let, hindrance, or obstructions from the Government's guards, and receipts of custom settled on different parts of the rivers and other inland parts of the provinces.—The duffick was also occasionally issued by the chiefs of your subordinate factories, under the same formalities ; and whether from the Presidency or Subordinates, always specified the place from whence the goods came and where destined ; and with the particulars before recited, were set forth both in English and Persians, and a register regularly kept of every duffick issued. The duffick was drawn in Persians as well as English, because at every Government's chowkey there

there was stationed a Persian Moonsee (Writer or Secretary) on the part of the Government, who being a stranger to the English language, the Company's trade might otherwise be liable to obstruction, delay, loss and damage, by a longer detention in their boats at sometimes inclement seasons of the year.

Your servants, down to the junior Writer, were entitled to a duffick on application, for the protection of his private trade. The wisdom of first granting this liberty and indulgence, and the continuing it so long after the fatal consequences were visible, are points I will not here discuss. Let it suffice, that I say the abuse of it gave too just a handle to the Government for frequently putting a stop to the provision of your investment in every part of the provinces for one, two, and sometimes three months together, until bought off by the payment of a high mulct, which generally grew higher the longer a stand was made against it. Thus have I known a contention of this kind, which might easily (in the beginning of an embargo laid on your investment) have been compromised for fifty or a hundred thousand rupees, cost you, at the end of two or three months, three or four lacks. Though the policy of the government was invariable in this particular of the abuse of the duffick, (as formerly touching our trading in the three prohibited articles of salt, tobacco and beetlenut) they never before the times of the Subas Ally Verdy Khan and Surajad Dowla meditated the attack and destruction of your forts and garrisons; these had new and particular motives; former Subas on a transgression, either in the one or the other of the two before-mentioned causes, put an immediate stop to the provision of your investments, by laying a prohibition on the weavers and others employed in your manufactures, surrounding your Subordinates with guards, and cutting off supplies of provisions, &c. They knew the importance of your investments, and the seasons for the dispatch of it to Europe, and knew also you could hardly sustain

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yourselves.

yourselves under the failure of one year's returns; all this they were perfectly acquainted with, and therefore knew your servants must necessarily submit, sooner or later, to any terms they thought fit to impose: a consideration also, which should have determined your Presidency to finish every dispute of this kind with all possible expedition. I will not say these exactions would not have been made, had no real cause been given; light pretences are sufficient for arbitrary governments to act upon; but where real cause existed, which (regarding the abuse of the duffick at least) was too truly the case, we cannot surely much wonder at it. But to explain the nature of this abuse of your duffick, so constantly the source of complaints from the durbar:

When youth first embark in your service, at the age of 15 or 16, it cannot be reasonably supposed they set out with any fixed principles of moral rectitude; consequently the good dispositions they may have acquired by a careful education become too much liable to be perverted, by designing artful men. These young gentlemen, on their arrival in Bengal, entertain a servant, under the denomination of a Banian, who, in the general, soon becomes their master, and continues that power and influence over them, more or less, as long as they reside in India; but more especially, if the Banian happens to be possessed of a capital that can be assisting to his (nominal) master in trade, the young gentleman himself rarely having a capital of his own to begin with.

These Banians are either simply so, or merchants as well as Banians. In general, they have no principle to be the rule of their actions, but gain; this is their sole pursuit, and to accomplish it they stick at nothing, so they can guard against a detection of their rogueries.

If they are Banians simply so called, they are mostly tools of some native merchant, whose principles of rectitude are not a whit better than the Banians.

The Seats (a Gentoo Cast, so called) and the other Company's Dadney merchants, who provided their investments until the year 1753, rarely before that period stooped to be Banians to the gentlemen in your service; but from that period, finding the measure was adopted for providing your investment by your own gomastahs or factors at the Arungs, they condescended to serve either in person or by Banians who were entirely dependant on them.

These Dadney merchants, whilst they continued in that employ, always had the address to bring down their own private goods and merchandize with the Company's, under the cover and protection of the same dustick; but being in the above-mentioned year stripped of that means of eluding the king's duties, they fixed on another which they knew had been for a long term successfully practised by the Banians; that is, covering their trade by the Company's dusticks, obtained chiefly from your junior servants.

Various were the terms of this illicit compact; sometimes the Company's servant was entitled to $\frac{1}{4}$ th, $\frac{1}{3}$ th, or $\frac{1}{2}$ of the profits on the trade so covered. At other times, with sorrow I speak it, your dustick was sold at various prices, from 200 to 25 rupees each; and to such a shameful prostitution did this trade in dusticks come to, that it was no uncommon thing to see on the register a trade of two lack per annum carried on in appearance by persons known never to have been worth five pounds in their lives, nor that had credit to this amount in your Presidency. Sometimes they engaged in a joint trade, the Banian or merchant

merchant finding the capital, in the course of which if your servants came in for 1-16th of the profits he was well off, but oftener brought in debtor.

The Government's spies in the settlement were well acquainted with these prostitutions and abuse of the Company's Duffick, and sent daily advices thereof to the Durbar, where it used to be often thrown out in terrorem "that they had a long Duffick account to "settle with the English."—And Surajud Dowla in 1756, declared he would prove from vouchers in his possession "that the English had defrauded the King in his revenues, by covering the trade of his "subjects with their Dufficks to the amount of one Corore and a "half (one million five hundred thousand pound sterling) in the "space of fifty years." However this charge was exaggerated, it is a truth, that the sum of the frauds arising from this illicit practice must have been very important.

Your Court of Directors were so sensible of the repeated abuse of this indulgence, that I think, there are no less than five and twenty **STANDING ORDERS** against it transmitted to your President and Council of Fort William from the year 1702 to 1756, each of these orders directing on detection, restitution of the King's duties, immediate dismissal from the service, and the aggressor to be sent to England on the first returning ship; but notwithstanding these orders, and the utmost vigilance of your Council abroad to prevent this practice, it was found impossible. The strongest prohibitions, the most solemn oaths, proved ineffectual; and though it was notoriously known, that there was hardly any period of your service, that there were not some of your servants who had no visible means of subsisting, but on this trade of Dufficks; yet, strange to tell! we find few examples made of the aggressors on the records of the Company. This can be accounted

ed for, only from the difficulty of full detection; but surely in this case, where the very existence of the Company was liable to be brought into hazard, strong and glaring presumption of the fact should have been deemed proof sufficient; the more especially, as it was long evident, nothing but examples made on this presumptive proof, would be capable of putting a total stop to a practice that had so often embroiled, and distressed your affairs; and was at last *one* of those causes assigned by Surajud Dowla, for that destruction brought on your Bengal settlements in 1756. These examples should not have been confined to your servants only, but should have been extended to the Black Merchant or Banian, *suspected* of being concerned with them; these should have been banished your settlements, and in flagrant instances delivered up to the government. Three examples of this kind, we dare say, would have effectually put a stop to this mischief for ever: We think some directions to the above purport and intention were sent out by your Court of Directors a few years ago, but they were never put in practice.

To draw our foregoing anecdotes into a smaller compass, we beg leave to remind you, that we have shewn two principal causes that gave rise to every contest which happened between your servants and the Government, down to the time of Surajud Dowla, viz. Your servants trading in the three prohibited articles so often mentioned, and their abuse of the Company's Duffick, both repeatedly forbid by your Court of Directors under the severest and most positive restrictions, and yet both continued, and lately the one of them absolutely avowed, nay, even contended for by some of your servants with indecency, arrogance and violence; to the utter subversion of the laws and natural liberties of a country where you trade upon sufferance, as well as in defiance and disobedience of the reiterated commands of their masters at home.

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Let us take a short view of this government in the year 1760, when you saw a Vice Roy at the head of it, raised by your servants from motives of justice, joined to the necessity of your affairs; confirmed by yourselves in the opinion and judgment of your directors: Consider this Vice Roy making you princely donations of the most valuable parts of his country; then see your servants aiming to strip him of the remainder, the commercial legal duties which were to be his future support in that government you had promoted him to—now see him drove from two of his provinces for not tamely submitting to arrogant impositions—then surely you will blush for the reproaches so wantonly thrown upon the English name and nation. But to return more immediately to our subject.

Soon after Mr. Vanfittart's arrival to the Government of Fort William, such was the licentious conduct of your servants, more particularly at your subordinates, in those articles of trade so often forbid both by the Company and Government, that continual complaints came in of the unbounded violences of them and their agents. Mr. Vanfittart plainly saw, unless some remedy was applied, general confusion must ensue. He took a middle road, and formed a judicious plan that all parties ought to have been satisfied with, and, as he expresses it, would have reconciled all differences, if faithfully adhered to on both sides: The liberties of the Phirmaunds touching these contested articles, as well as the whole inland trade, had been given up and relinquished by the Company long ago.—He has the merit of stipulating for the resuming those liberties, and preserving them in perpetuity on terms highly advantageous to every one engaged in it, as we have already made appear. It has been charged against him, that he concluded this Treaty of Commerce without the assent of his Council—That he was first invested with a discretionary power has been proved

beyond contradiction ; and though it has been also insinuated, he suppressed and never acknowledged the receipt of a letter sent by the Council, revoking that power, and containing a dissent to the terms of the Treaty transmitted to them by Mr. Vanfittart :—yet—if such a revocation and dissent was dispatched, it appears very extraordinary that his enemies have not produced a copy of it, since, in other matters less important, they have been so minute.—Therefore it is no unreasonable conclusion to say, we believe no such letter was ever sent,—or it would certainly have appeared against him.—Another objection has been started against his conduct, for not giving due time for this Treaty taking place.——To this we say, that possibly he thought this licentious contraband trade of your servants required an immediate check.—And as they had engaged in it, in direct breach of their masters orders, and we fear in breach also of their covenants ; it was but just they should suffer the consequences, for they surely had no title to indulgence. One objection only, to this Gentleman's conduct regarding this treaty, remains unanswered ; and that is the article by which he gives the decision of disputes into the hands of the Government's officers : but for this error he has so ingenuously apologised himself, that nothing but ill-nature could be capable of continuing it as a charge against him. However, had not the unhappy and ill-judged second deputation taken place, this error might easily have been retrieved, and overruled as soon as the inconveniences had been discovered.

Concerning *the present of Cannon*, (levelled at Mr. Vanfittart's reputation only) the charge is so evidently malicious, as hardly to deserve a reply.—It is a notorious truth, that at the capture of Cozzimbuzar and Fort William, the Government had store both of cannon and field pieces with their carriages, which they had six months in their possession.

possession.—Surajad Dowla had 20 of the latter so well constructed by his own people, that they could hardly be known from those made in Europe. But we will not affront your understanding, by dwelling longer in the refutation of a charge so repugnant to sense as well as decency.

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